

# GAMING MACHINES AND SYSTEMS OFFERING SIMULTANEOUS PLAY OF MULTIPLE GAMES AND METHODS OF GAMING

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

### [0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to gaming devices, systems and methods for playing games of chance. More particularly, the present invention relates to apparatus, systems and methods for displaying and playing multiple games of chance of the same or varying types on a single display screen.

### [0003] 2. State of the Art

[0004] Gaming machines such as slot machines, keno machines and video poker machines are popular sources of entertainment that have been a cornerstone of the gaming industry for many years. Generally, the popularity of such gaming machines with players is dependent upon the entertainment value of the machine relative to other available gaming options, as well as the likelihood (or perceived likelihood) of winning money at the machine. As a result, casino operators are constantly looking for ways to enhance the entertainment value and perceived payoff values of the games of chance located within their establishments.

[0005] Presently, factors contributing to increased entertainment value of gaming devices are linked to recent advances in microprocessor and communications technologies that enable new and interesting variations in traditional games of chance and gaming devices, including ease in accessing and playing the various games. For example, gaming devices have been networked together for tournament play [,] and linked to the Internet to allow play from remote locations. Today, players may opt to swipe their credit or debit cards in a gaming device to initiate a game or a series of games, and video displays realistically simulate board games and the spin of mechanical reels on a slot machine. While player-enticing advances have been made, [however,] the available technology has not been utilized to the fullest extent possible.

[0006] Slot machines, while typically among the most lucrative sources of income for a casino, are one type of gaming machine that has not benefitted as much as possible from recent technological advances. Traditional slot machines commonly in use are typically stand-alone devices intended to be played by a single player. To initiate play, a player inserts one or more coins or bills therein (or swipes a credit or debit card) and either pushes a button or pulls a lever to begin play. Depending on the final position of the spinning wheels within the slot machine, the machine determines whether or not and how much the player has won.

[0007] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a conventional gaming machine configured as a slot machine 20. Slot machine 20 comprises an exterior housing 22, a glass [mid-section]midsection 24, a main display 26, and an upper glass portion 28. Main display 26 includes windows 30, 32, and 34. In each of windows 30, 32, and 34 is a single reel 36, 38, 40 of the slot machine 20. Spanning windows 30, 32, and 34 are various paylines, including horizontal paylines 42, 44, 46 and diagonal paylines 48, 50. Upon the deposit of an appropriate amount of currency recognized by slot

machine 20, one or more of the paylines 42, 44, 46, 48, 50 may be selected by a player, thus allowing for multiple winning combinations.

[0008] The upper glass portion 28 and glass [mid-section] midsection 24 typically contain printed information conveying various thematic, instructive, and informative details, such as a paytable display, relating to the operation of slot machine 20. Upper glass portion 28 and glass [mid-section] midsection 24 are also typically backlit so that information printed on them is readily visible to players of the slot machine 20. Play buttons 58 are provided between glass [mid-section]midsection 24 and main display 26 and allow the player to control operation of slot machine 20. A coin acceptor 60, bill acceptor/validator 62, and credit card/casino card input device 64 are provided near play buttons 58 for operation of slot machine 20. A coin tray [62]66 is provided near the lower third of slot machine 20 to collect coin pay outs resulting from winning plays.

[0009] One feature in reel-type slot machines which has been successfully employed to enhance the perceived payoff value of a game is that of multiple paylines, scatter-pay wins or unusually-shaped paylines. To achieve these various winning configurations, the mechanical reels of traditional slot machines have been replaced with video simulations of reels whose available range of indicia (e.g., symbols) are expanded by use of a microprocessor. Such games allow the player to select the number of paylines and to vary the amount of credits wagered on one or more paylines. Winning combinations resulting in pay outs are determined as a result of matching the game's payable with payline or other winning combination of indicia selected by random number generation. Thus, such machines afford more opportunities to win with each activation of the reels. When placing bets on multiple paylines, the player increases his chances for achieving a winning combination while at the same time betting more money.

[0010] In further efforts to make slot play more attractive to casino patrons, systems have been disclosed which offer a plurality of slot machines which are electronically networked together and congregated about a common area. In U.S. Pat. No. 4,805,907 to Hagiwara et al. ("Hagiwara"), a system is disclosed in which a plurality of subordinate slot machines have their outputs connected to a main machine for controlling the game and having a large display thereon. The large display on the main machine is identical to the display shown on each subordinate machine, and allows the players and spectators to observe the progress and results of a game. Hagiwara teaches that the "feeling of togetherness" created by the networked system attracts more players and consequently brings about more profit to the owner of the slot machine.

[0011] To increase the opportunity to win, some players prefer to play several slot machines (or gaming machines of other various types) at once. With a higher number of spins per time period of play, the odds of at least one spin turning up a winning combination will be increased. Typically, a player playing two or more gaming machines at once will move back and forth between the machines to deposit money, wager credits, and initiate play. Since the player is playing multiple games at once, the amounts cumulatively wagered by the player will typically be greater. There are several disadvantages, however, to this mode of play. First,